Interreg – IPA CBC
CCI 2014 TC 16 I5CB 009
We Cross Borders

Deliverable 3.1

"Transfer of Knowledge"

Interreg IPA CBC Programme
"Greece- Republic of North Macedonia 2014-2020"

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

Introduction

A study-visit concerning the transfer of knowledge on procedures, control checks and organization at the Border Crossing Points (BCPs) took place on **25-28 November 2019** at the premises of **"Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert Team (CELBET)"** followed by an on-site visit at the **Narva Border Crossing Point (BCP).**
The **"Estonian Tax and Customs Board"** (member of **CELBET**) invited the project partners and organized together with the Lead Partner the study-visit.

The visit focused on best practices at European level assessed as relevant with the current European Territorial Cooperation Project "We Cross Borders", especially as it includes partners from both EU Member States and third countries, under the respective INTERREG IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programme.

***Note**: The data, figures and graphs presented in this report are kindly offered by the **Estonian Tax and Customs Board/CELBET**.*

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

Table of contents

List of Participants

Mr. Konstantinos Serderidis, “We Cross Borders” Project Manager, DAMT Head of Organization Office Employee (LP)
Mrs. Thomai Veazoglou, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, Deputy Head of Department of Border Stations, DAMT Border Stations Coordination Team (LP)
Mr. Anastasios Karavanas, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, DAMT Border Stations Coordination Team (LP)
Mr. Nikolaos Papadopoulos, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, DAMT Directorate of Administration (LP)
Mr. Zoran Petkovski, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, Assistant Director of Sector for administrative-technical issues (PB2)
Mrs. Tanja Ilijoska, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, Head of Customs House Gevgelija (PB2)
Mr. Jovo Dzuteski, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, Senior Advisor in Sector for administrative-technical issues (PB2)
Mr. Gorgi Iliev, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, Senior Advisor in Sector for administrative-technical issues (PB2)
Mr. Stavros Rodokanakis, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (PB3)
Mrs. Stella Triantafillidou “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (PB3)
Mrs. Aikaterini Mpliamou, “We Cross Borders” Project Team Member, Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (PB3)
Mr. Nikola Panov, Assistant of the Head of the Regional Center for Border Affairs-South (PB4)

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

1. Estonian Tax and customs board - CELBET

The hosting organization **"Estonian Tax and customs board (ETCB)"** is a member of the European Organization **CELBET**. **CELBET** was established in 2015 as an initiative of eleven EU Member States (MS): Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece and operates under the **Customs 2020 Programme**.

2. Shared standards, common approach, communication with the neighboring BCPs/Overview on exchange of information and communication between countries

According to the **EC TAXUD** Guidelines on further development of the cooperation between Border Guard and Customs the following principles should apply.

Agreements, memoranda of understanding, protocols among Customs Authority (CA) and Border Guard (BG) should be agreed at the national level and **should contain** following elements:

- principles for the distribution of responsibilities between authorities
- communication channels and contact points at national, regional and local level
- principles of cooperation in joint operations, risk analysis and information exchange, investigations, planning, use of infrastructure and equipment, training
- contingency planning at national or regional/local level to increase the response capacity for border control
- evaluation mechanism to assess implementation, progress and further cooperation development

Three modules of agreements available at different cooperation levels (national/international) and different authorities' level [at the level of EU Member States (MS) authorities, such as Customs Authority (CA), Border Guard (BG)] were presented.
More specifically:

- Agreement between EU MS CA-EU MS Border Guard at national level
- Agreement between EU MS CA-3rd Country's CA at international level
- Agreement between EU MS CA/BG-3rd Country's CA/BG at *advanced* international level

All types of agreements have been applied at all levels up-to-date.

Details on the bilateral agreement between Estonia and Russia CAs were provided.
The objectives of the agreement comprise:

- to ensure continuous flow at the EE-RU border
- to reduce the number of vehicles awaiting for entry before BCP and waiting next service control at the BCP
- to speed up border controls and border crossing process
- to increase BCP capacity by using available resource for 100% and even more as it is possible
- to increase the permeability of BCP
- to ensure co-ordinated action of CA and BG officials at peak times and emergencies

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

Furthermore, the more advanced application of the agreement between Latvia (LV) and Belarus (BY) was presented.

The experience of the cooperation among Latvian and Belarusian CA and BG
In this scheme there are four (4) partners from two (2) countries:
- **SRS National Customs Board** and **State Border Guard** (LV)
- **State Customs Committee** and **State Border Guards Committee** (BY)

An Evaluation mechanism has been put in place to assess on regular basis the implementation, progress and further cooperation development. The cooperation is differentiated depending on hierarchical level as follows:

- **Shift management level:** constantly
- **Regional level:** daily shifts reports to keep safe the control on ongoing situation
- **Central level** (WG): joint and regular CA/BG meeting at to assess the results and further cooperation

3. Protocols/procedures for incidents and emergencies at the BCP

The modus operandi of the joint Customs Authority (CA)/Border Guard (BG) management scheme of the emergencies and peak time at the BCPs was analyzed.
The main components of a joint management scheme are:

- ✓ a single definition of emergency situations and peak time
- ✓ detection of communication channels and contact points at local, national, regional level
- ✓ jointly agreed single balanced BCPs capacity *(agreed optimal numbers of vehicles per day)*
- ✓ agreed smooth and rhythmic traffic *(agreed optimal numbers of vehicles per an hour)*
- ✓ agreed acceptable queues length before entering the BCP
- ✓ insured responses/actions to emergencies to speed up BCPs' capacity
- ✓ evaluation mechanism on regular basis to assess implementation, progress and further cooperation development

Information was provided on the contingency plan. The cooperation takes place at different levels stepwise.
First cooperation level among officials at the BCP:

1) Inform the other side about situation
2) Two (2) hours for the response actions to emergencies or peak time
3) No expected results or no communication with other side

→ Move to the **Second cooperation level at the regional level**

Second cooperation level at the regional level:

1) Inform the other side about situation
2) Two (2) hours for the response actions to emergencies or peak time
3) No expected results or no communication with other side

→ Move to the **Third cooperation level at the central HQs level in capitals**

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

4. One-stop shop concept (combined customs/police-border guard control)

A very interesting feature is the combined customs/border guard control, which is applied by synchronized checks at the Estonian BCPs following the rationale of the EU Smart Borders concept. In effect, a syncronized check is performed by a *single* officer involving both customs and border guard parts.

This has lead to significant benefits:

- Human resources use: savings in a number of +8 officers for each authority
- Faster border crossing for lorries: ~ 20%
- Common use of the individual information systems – better risk analysis
- Single window principle – more comfortable border crossing
- More flexible usage of infrastructure and human resources during peak hours

The actual figures presented demonstated the improvement in Border-crossing time change compared to the old rules of procedure:

5. Common standards-specs/harmonization for Equipment and Tools, compatibility-interoperability issues

The paradigm of a multinational agreement among the three Baltic countries Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia to fight contraband via a common information system was presented.

BAXE Baltic X-ray Image Exchange System

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined forces in 2015 to develop a new type of information sharing system. This lead to a system with 12 X-ray scanners with automatic image and info sharing connected. Currently BAXE has a database with ~ 30 000 x-ray images.

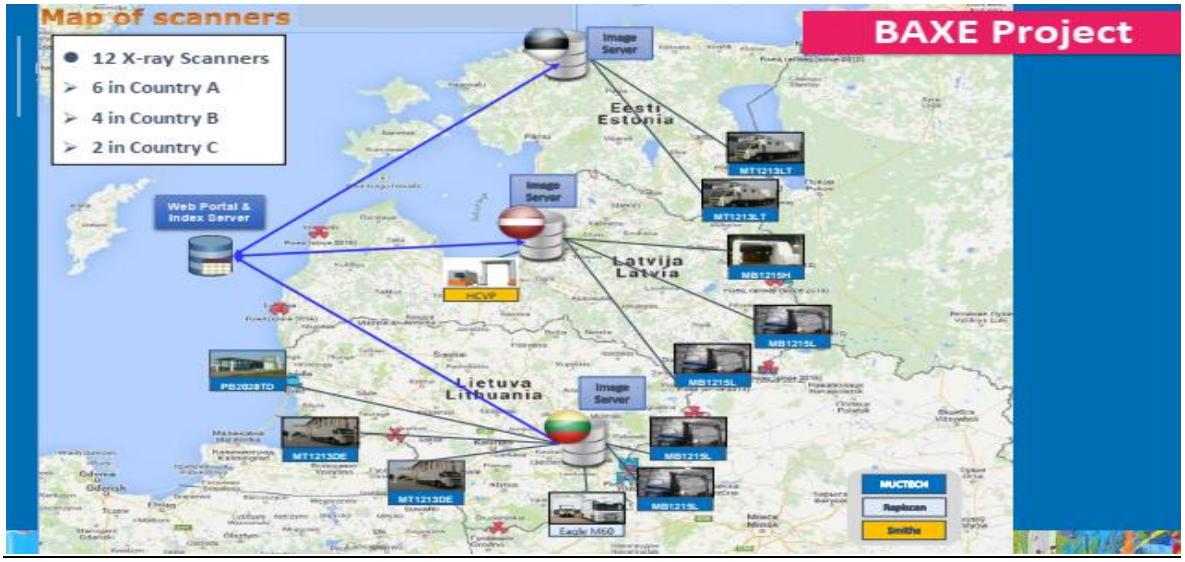

Figure 1: BAXE System ***(source: ETCB/CE LBET)***

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

The system benefits are obvious:

- Instant image and info sharing
- Automatic alarm if vehicle has seizures in history
- Possibility to compare different types of cargos and vehicles
- Training options with different cargos, vehicles, seizures
- Remote supervision and image analyzing center

For instance, camera images of vehicles entering one country are accessible by the other countries. The system was developed by a private company and accessible by each country's authorities.

Automated Number Plate Recognition System (ANPR)

Estonia has 34 checkpoints with ANPRs covering biggest seaports, border checkpoints with Russia and border crossing points at the southern border with Latvia. ANPR is interfaced with the ANPRs of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland giving opportunity for cooperation and numerous customs seizures.
The ANPRs has the following features:

- Launched in 2007 and works 24/7
- Possibility to read number plates and numbers of containers
- Enables to identify nationality of the vehicle
- Enables to identify first, side and tail data
- Equipped with automatic light of the cameras
- Can be handled from distance

The main functions support:

- Search for registration number, date, BCP and nationality
- Register border crossing date, place and route
- Enable profile by the registration number
- Forward the alert to the mailbox and/or to phone
- Additional tool for risk analysis and set of risk data
- Create and export lists in MS Excel format
- Create the group of addresses
- Store the results of control together with alerts

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

6. Site visit: Eastern Customs Office - Narva Border Crossing Point

The on-site visit took place at the Eastern Customs Office - Narva BCP.

- **Introduction of the organization of customs control at the BCP**
  - Location: Between Narva(population 57.130) and Ivangorod (population 11.833)
  - Space:17.000 m²
  - Number of Customs officers: 78
  - Number of BG officers: 112
  - Transport traffic: Pedestrians (3.840.257); Passenger cars (505.433); Trucks (72.281); Buses (25456);Trains (2.731)

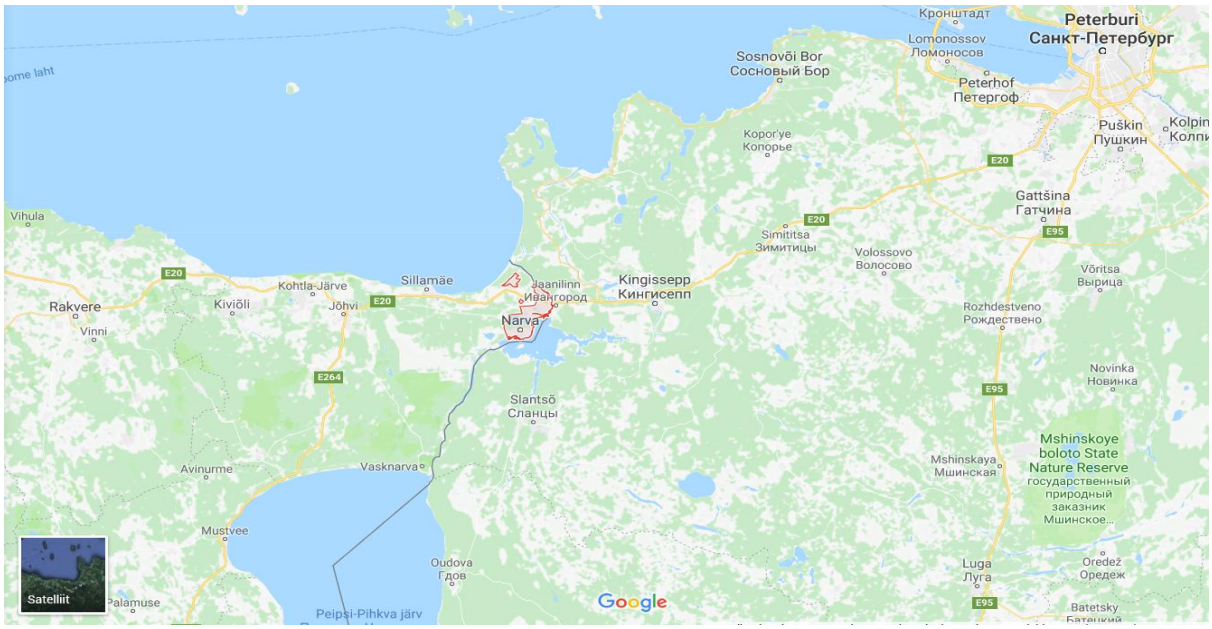

Figure 2: Narva BCP Location ***(source: ETCB/CE LBET)***

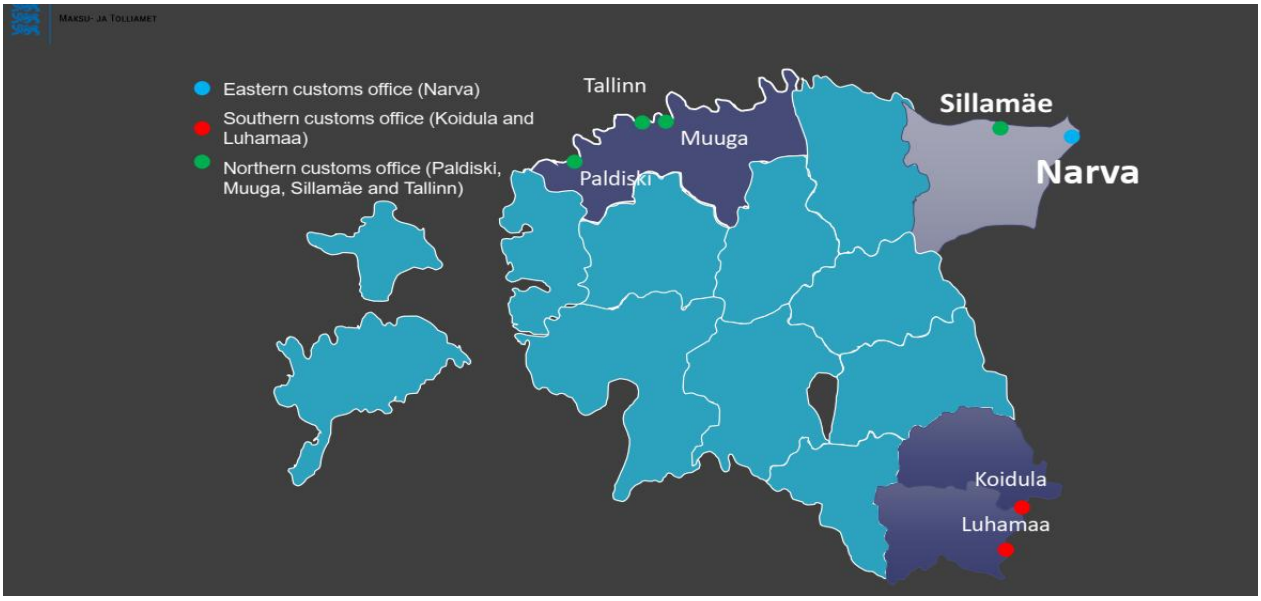

Figure 3: Border Crossing Points ***(source: ETCB/CE LBET)***

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

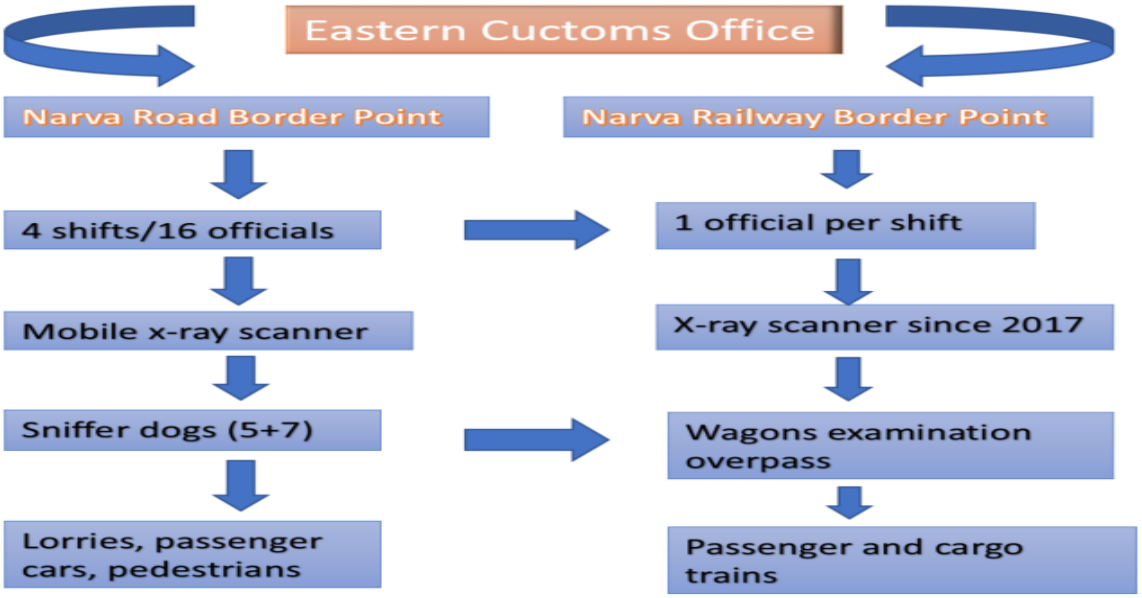

Figure 4: Eastern Customs Office Information ***(source: ETCB/CE LBET)***

- **Introduction of the technical equipment and the organization of work at the BCP**

The equipment is available at the BCP, part of it was demonstrated at the site visit. This is depicted in the following figure.

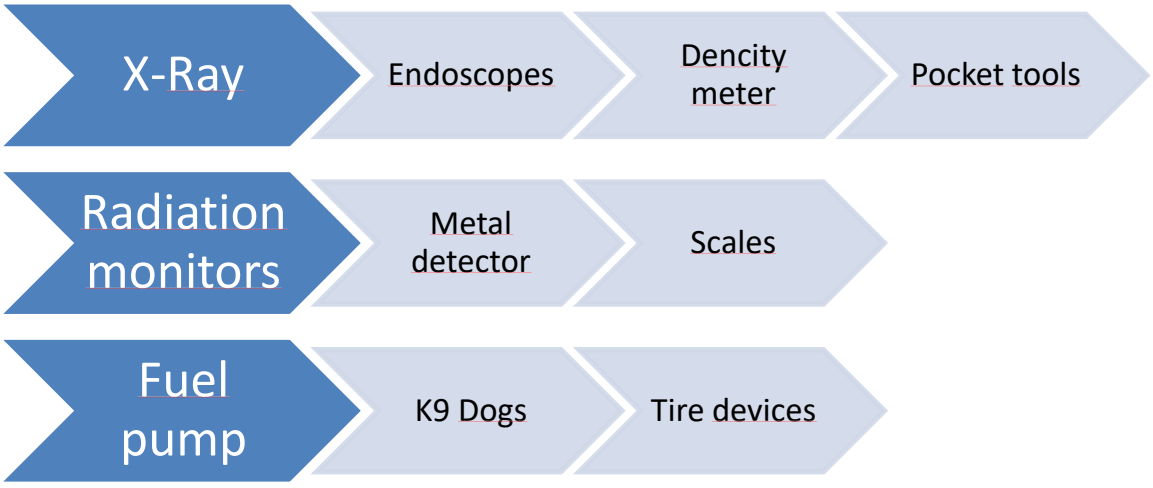

Figure 5: Equipment at the BCP ***(source: ETCB/CE LBET)***

There is a set of diversified systems for selecting different subjects/objects to control:

- SELECT-declarations
- PIKO-passengers
- Automated Number Plate Recognition System (ANPR)-vehicles
- Customs task management system (CTMS)- randomly selecting objects to control

There is also the possibility to add alarms to objects.

Video surveillance systems

Different IP cameras with:

- sound recording capability
- motion detection
- auto-routing

All videos are recorded and can be reviewed for a 3 months period. As part of the upgrade, the cameras were transferred to the Police and Border Guard Administration system.

X-ray systems and buildings

A complete project to modernize infrastructure took place. Four (4) new x-ray cargo inspection scanners and one (1) railway scanner were recently purchased to upgrade the existing three (3) scanners. Modernization of the control halls and construction of the Narva railway x-ray scanner site were part of the project.

Narva railway x-ray scanner site

The project included some unique features to accommodate the requirements and the existing conditions.

- Most extreme location: no room for conventional scanner solutions
- Most creative ideas: 10 times less room than normally needed for railway scanner
- Most difficult terms: on the one side people work 10m from the scanner 24h/d, on the other side: City traffic + railway workers walk through scanner at least 10 times/day
- Most innovative solutions: fully automatic scanning system
- Most efficient result: operators only have to do routine check for any faults and after
  scanning image analysis – this is also possible remotely from 2 other border crossing points

Figure 6: Narva Railway scanner site ***(source: ETCB/CE LBET)***

7. Best practices: Metrics used to evaluate BCPs performance

Certain indicators are in force to evaluate the performance of the BCPs.

Impact indicators:
- Monitoring checks at the Eastern border
- The estimated number of illicit cigarettes

Performance indicators (BCP level):
- Effect coefficient of checks in the shift
- Coefficient of overall result in the shift
- Use of control resources
- Monitoring checks versus selection by Officer

Activities in BCP:
- Number of checks
- Number of X-ray scans

Monitoring checks are also applied to measure:
- The amount of non-declared or/and smuggled goods
- The amount of legal cigarettes
- The changes in the dynamics of violations (food products, weapons etc.)

Information is collected to measure:
- Efficiency of customs control
- Impact of the control measures

An innovative Electronic **E-queue** system has also been applied enabling the flexible regulation of traffic by prior online registration:
https://www.eestipiir.ee/yphis/index.action?request_locale=en

It provides real-time information and operates on the following principles:

Pre-Reserve queue
allows the reserving of a border crossing time for a certain day and hour.

Priority Queue
Right for a Priority queue slot at the border depending on authorization rights

Live Queue
Right for a Priority queue slot at the border depending on authorization rights

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

8. Conclusion

The study-visit was considered a fruitful exchange of practices and an efficient transfer of knowledge from one Border Crossing Point station which applies custom protocols/procedures and up-to-date technology features. Certain features will be considered for application at the Customs offices of the participating countries in the frame of the running cooperation project and in the future as well.
The study-visit served also in the establishment of a communication channel with CELBET, as designated European Customs Organization, with an ongoing project (CELBET Phase 2) at European Level.

Project co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries